

A discussion on Kurehats

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Kuthha and Sikhism

The controversy in the Khalsa Panth over being a vegetarian or non-vegetarian arose due to the difference in the interpretation of the word Kuthha - one of the four primary taboos or Cardinal Sins for the Sikhs. Before going into the depth of what "Kuthha" really means, it is imperative to consider the real importance of these taboos in Sikhism. It is an undisputed fact that any Sikh who commits any one of these four taboos becomes an apostate. That means he is no longer a Sikh, i.e., he is automatically de-linked and ex-communicated from the Khalsa Brotherhood, even though he may be considered a Sikh by society. As a natural corollary, he loses the Grace of the Satguru without which no progress can be made in achieving the Bliss of Naam-Simran. The four great taboos prescribed for the Sikhs are, thus, of fundamental importance.

Being of such fundamental importance, the four taboos cannot, obviously, be based upon any temporary contingency of the prevailing circumstances. They must have their own solid basis and foundation, and must be conducive to spiritual upliftment through Naam-Simran,

which occupies the pivotal position in the whole edifice of Sikhism. Otherwise, they will lose their applicability in the changed circumstances, especially when their role in the spiritual progress is doubtful or even negative. It is explicit in Gurbani that the principles of Gurmat are unchangeable and of permanent standing:

**"Gurmatat Mat Achal Hai
Chalaey Na Sakey Koey" (pg. 548)**

[The Instruction of the Guru is Unshakable. None can change it.]

Obviously, therefore, these four basic taboos formulated by the Tenth Guru must have their own solid base which would stand the stress of all times.

The word Kuthha is generally (or erroneously) taken to mean HaIaaI meat i.e. "Meat obtained by the Muslim method of slaying the animal, slowly severing the main blood artery of the throat of the animal, while reciting religious formulae, the main object of slaughtering in this manner being a sacrifice to God to expiate the sins of the slaughterer and its flesh as food being only a secondary object..." The Jhatka method has been described as killing the animal with one stroke of the weapon without exciting fear glands secreting poisons into its bloodstream and without causing harmful psychic waves to emanate from the animal's mind."

The origin and basis of Halaal method of slaying animals by Muslims may have been sacrificial. However, by the time of the Sikh Gurus, it had just become a

"Muslim method" without any consideration of its sacrificial origin. In fact, a separate class of professionals, called butchers, had emerged with the sole purpose of slaying the animals in this way. Thus, through the employment of butchers, the original idea of slaughtering the animal as a "sacrifice to God to expiate the sins of the slaughterer" had ceased to exist. The original practice had become professionalized and commercialized and remains so even now. So, according to the generally prevailing idea as advocated by many Sikh scholars, the main reason for imposing this taboo of not eating Halaal meat is not that it is sacrificial or even religious. Rather this taboo had been imposed primarily to liberate the Sikhs from mental slavery of the then rulers of the Muslim faith who had banned by law the slaying of animals by any method other than Halaal. If this interpretation is accepted, then the following points arise:

(i) With the changed times now, when there is no longer such coercion from any quarter, there should be no need for continuing this taboo in the list of the four taboos because the reason for the imposition of this taboo no longer exists.

(ii) It also implies that the four taboos which, have been declared by Satguru himself as basic and of fundamental importance, may not necessarily be conducive to spiritual enhancement of the soul through Naam-Simran; their objective being merely to create a spirit of moral, and, according to some, physical strength to face the unjust and tyrannic rule of the then rulers. Obviously, this cannot be the situation as the main and

the only objective of the Satguru was and is to implant the Holy Naam firmly in the minds of the Sikhs through Holy Amrit (Khande-Ki.Pahul). One cannot imagine the All knowing Satguru imposing a taboo of such basic importance which has no relationship with, or which does not help his Sikhs in the achievement of the Spiritual Bliss.

(iii) If we accept this position of a taboo being imposed only to serve the conditions prevailing at a particular time, then we provide a pretext to the so-called Modern Sikhs who consider that the keeping of Keshas is no longer necessary in the changed times. They also contend that Kirpan is now of little significance in this atomic age. They openly assert that religion must change with the changing times. The spirit of Sikhism, according to them, lies only within the Sikhs and it has nothing to do with the outward appearance or baanaa. They further contend that the then prevailing circumstances made the necessity of keeping Sikhs unique and easily distinguishable. In the changed circumstances that necessity no longer exists. Thus, accepting the above background of the Kuthha will lead to total destruction of the edifice of Sikhism.

(iv) Moreover, how would we classify fish? Is it HaIaal or Jhatka?

(v) Meat-eating Sikh brethren advocate that the only touchstone to be used in deciding whether meat should be eaten or refrained from, is whether it creates trouble in the body and fills the mind with evil. If there is no such ill effect then there is no harm in eating it. In the support of this contention, they cite the following couplet from Gurbani:

**"Baba Hore Khanna Khushi Khuaar
Jit Khaadey Tan Peeriay,
Man Mey Chaley Vikaar" (pg. 196)**

O Baba! All other foods (except the Naam) create trouble in the body and fill the mind with evil.

Evidently the foregoing couplet is a mis-quotation in this context because herein Guru Sahib is comparing all material foods with the Divine Food (i.e. Naam-Simran) and is decrying the former. The word HORE is very crucial in this couplet. It does not mean ANY food but any OTHER food, i.e., any food other than NAAM. In the absence of the Divine Food (Naam), all material foods will sicken the body as well as the soul. The very idea of eating meat fills the mind with evil making it aggressive and a partner in taking the life of an innocent creature. For this very reason, almost all of the well-known spiritually enlightened Gursikhs of the past and present have been and are shunning meat and allied non-vegetarian foods. Such foods are not conducive to spiritual development and Naam-Simran and, therefore, the all-knowing Satguru could not approve them.

(vi) In two Hukam Naamaas of Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib there are clear cut instructions prohibiting the eating of meat, fish, etc. The actual words used are "Maas machhi de nerrey nahin jawnaa." when Guru Nanak in his sixth form prohibits Sikhs from eating flesh in such a strong language, how can he, in his tenth form, issue instructions absolutely contrary to and in negation of his own earlier instructions?

(vii) Mohsin Fani (1615-70), the well known historian and a contemporary of Sri Guru Hargobind

Sahib, writes in his work DABISTAN-E- MAZAHIB as follows:

"Having prohibited his disciples to drink wine and eat pork, he (Nanak) himself abstained from eating flesh and ordered not to hurt any living being. After him this precept was neglected by his followers; but Aijun Mal, one of the substitutes of his Faith, renewed the prohibition to eat flesh and said: This has not been approved by Nanak"

What clear cut evidence against eating flesh and drinking wine in Sikhism!

(viii) Sahib Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji's "UPDESH" to Bhai Daya Singh Ji which is mentioned in "SUDHARAM MARAG GRANTH", and also found written in some old handwritten volumes of Sri Guru Granth Sahib: "One who does not: (a) Steal, (b) Commit adultery, (c) Slander anyone, (d) Gamble, (e) Eat meat or drink wine, will be liberated in this very life (i.e. Jeewan Mukht)"

(ix). It is also asserted that bravery is connected with eating animal flesh. The assertion is baseless. In fact, bravery is not connected with brute body force. Real bravery comes out of the spirit of sacrifice for the Truth and arises from the state of mind. The very prevalent words Charhdi Kala among the Sikhs refer to the Charhdi Kala of the spirit. The Sikh history is full of such instances where Sikhs who were hungry for days together defeated the tyrant Mughal forces whose meat eating habits were legendary.

(x) There is no difference in either taste or nutritive content of meat obtained through Jhatka or Halaal methods. Meat remains meat, whatever may be

the method of slaying the animal. It is a mockery of the august and everlasting holy fundamental principles of Gurmat to attach such a fundamental importance to meat obtained from a particular method of slaying the animal, that its eating by a Sikh makes him an apostate, and that obtained from another method of slaying becomes fully acceptable. Either meat is allowed or is prohibited totally. There can be no mid-way. It is rather strange that many 'modern' and 'intellectual' Sikhs, who are often questioning the rationale of such edicts as keeping of Kirpan or Keshas and even the particular type of Kachhehra, generally do not question the rationale of Jhatka and Halaal distinction in respect of meat. Obviously, it is the generally preferred taste of the tongue that keeps them mum on this issue.

These are only a few of the inconsistencies and contradictions in accepting the interpretation of Kuthha to mean Halaal type of meat.

Now let us consider as to what is the true meaning of the word Kuthha Etymologically, the word "Kuthha" (killed) is a past participle which has been derived from the root "Kohna" which means to slay or kill. This word does not mean to slay slowly or according to the Muslim method. In fact, to my knowledge, this word has never been used in the Muslim literature or in their general language to refer to "Halaal" meat. There are number of similarly derived words, e.g. "Muthha," "Dhatthha," etc. Thus, the word "Kuthha" literally means meat obtained by killing animals with any sharp weapon irrespective of whether any holy hymns are read at that time or not. In fact, reading of an holy hymns on this most cruel and heartless moment, is itself a highly sacrilegious act. For instance if one accepts a bribe or commits a theft while

reciting holy hymns and these claims that because of his having read holy hymns during that act it no longer remains a crime, is only fooling himself.

Now consider this from another angle. For Halal meat, the animal is killed while reciting Qalima - the holy Mantra of the Muslims praising God in Arabic language. For obtaining Jhatka meat, they say Sat Sri Akal, which is also praise of God but in Punjabi language. Meat obtained while reciting praise of God in Arabic language is Haiaal (sacred) for a Muslim and is Haraam (unsacred) for a Sikh. Likewise meat obtained while reciting praise of God in Punjabi language is HaIaaI (sacred) for a Sikh and Haraam (unsacred) for a Muslim. By implication, meat being the common factor in both cases, Qalima is Haraam for a Sikh and Sat Sri Akal is Haraam for a Muslim. If both Qalima and Sat Sri Akal are praises of God in different languages, neither of them is Haraam. In fact, Haraam is the selfish trend of the mind of the meat eaters.

S. Kapur Singh rightly points out "Sikhism is not a religion of confusion and tomfoolery. The Sikh Way of Life is based upon the highest principle of Divinity -with the ultimate goal of merging one's soul (Atma) with the Ultimate Soul (Param-Atma) In Gurbani the word 'Kuthha' as well as 'Kohna' have been used at a number of places in this sense:

**"Paap Karender Sarpar Muthey.
Ajraeel Pharrey Phar KUTHHEY"** (pg. 1019)

The sinner will certainly be ruined or destroyed.
The angel of death will seize and kill them.
(Here the word "kuthhey" means simply killing, not killing by Haiaal)

"Bed Parhey Mukh Mitthee Baani

Jeeaan KUHAT Na Sangey Paraanee" (pg. 201)

He (Pandit) recites the Vedas very sweetly, but he does not hesitate to kill life.

"Abhakhya Ka Kuthha Bakra Khanaa

Choukay Upar Kisey Na Jaanaa" (pg. 472)

They eat the meat obtained while uttering the unspeakable word (referring to Qalima of the Muslims which the Hindus considered as unspeakable) and allow none to enter their kitchen square.

The supporters of the word Kuthha to mean Halaal meat very often bank upon the above cited couplet to support their contention. They ascribe it to mean the meat obtained by slaying goats while uttering Qalima, which is the Muslim way of slaughtering animals. If the word Kuthha were to mean HaIaai meat, the use of the word abhakhya is superfluous. The sentence should have been simply Kuthha Khaanaa to mean the eating of the HaIaai meat. The very fact that the word Kuthha has been qualified with the adjective abhakhya kaa means that Kuthha refers to simple meat of the killed animal, irrespective of the method of slaying the animal; and while qualifying meat to mean Haiaai, the words abhakhya kaa had to be particularly prefixed to convey that sense. Almost all the renowned commentators and translators of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, e.g., Bhai Sahib Vir Singh, Professor Sahib Singh, S. Manmohan Singh, etc., have interpreted this couplet in this way.

It is thus clear that the word Kuthha means simply meat of the killed animal and does not go into the detail of how the animal is killed. Like so many other adulterations committed by the anti-Sikhs in Gurmata

Rahit Maryada, this interpretation of the word Kuthha to mean HaiaaI meat has also been initiated and popularized by those very anti- Sikhs, in their efforts to destroy the roots of the new faith in order to decrease its efficacy and create doubts and dissensions in the Panth. Our brothers have unconsciously fallen in their trap.

The only hymn in the whole of Sri Guru Granth Sahib that is specifically cited (by meat-eaters) in support of eating meat is the hymn of Sahib Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji in the Var of Raag Malhar on pages 1289-90 beginning with the couplet:

**"Maas Maas Kar Moorakh Jhaghrrey.
Gian dhian Nahin Jaaney.
Kaun Maas Kaun Saag Kahaavey
Kis Mah Paap Samaaney"** (pg. 1289-1290)

Only the fool quarrels over the question of eating or not eating of the meat. He does not have the True Wisdom. Without True Wisdom or Meditation, he harps on which is flesh and which is not flesh and which food is sinful and which is not. A deeper study of the whole hymn brings out:

i. Herein, Guru Sahib is addressing a Vaishnav Pandit who believes that he can achieve his spiritual goal only by avoiding meat as food and not trying to obtain the true wisdom through meditation. He has stressed that only avoiding meat will not lead one to the achievement of Spiritual Bliss if one does not do Naam-Simran. This equally applies to all, including non-meat-eating Sikhs.

ii. It relates to the flesh or meat in general and not to any particular type of flesh - whether prepared by

Halaal or Jhatka method. The Sikh supporters of flesh eating do not accept at all the intake of all types of meat, but according to them, only Jhatka meat is permissible and HaIaal is totally prohibited. In other words, what does the term "Kuthha" denote?

iii. The flesh of the mother's womb wherein the human body is born, the flesh of the mother's breasts which feed the infant, the flesh of the tongue, ears, mouth, etc., used for perception of various senses of the body, the flesh in the form of wife and off-springs referred to in the Shabad, is flesh no doubt and one cannot escape it, but is it the flesh to be eaten as food by the humans? Does the love for this type of flesh involve any cruelty or slaughter of living bodies? Obviously, the Shabad has a deeper meaning telling Vaishnav pandits that merely escaping from the flesh does not take one anywhere. Nor can anyone get rid of the flesh (i.e., attainment of salvation from the cycle of birth and death) by his own futile efforts without the Grace of the True Guru.

One very well known Sikh writer, in his book on Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's life, while claiming that the above hymn supports meat eating, recommends that those Sikhs who seek spiritual bliss through Naam Simran should shun it! **Well, devoid of Naam Simran Sikhism is reduced to naught.**

At this point it would be worth mentioning two well known anecdotes from the life of Sahib Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji in this respect:

i. During his visit to Lahore, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji happened to stay in the neighborhood of a big slaughter house. In the ambrosial hours of the early morning, he

heard loud shrills and cries of the animals being butchered there. Then, in the daytime, he saw the population addicted to vices connected with meat, wine and women. He was so moved by this sight that he exclaimed:

**"Lahore shahar zahar kahar
sawa pahar"** (pg. 1412)

God's curse is upon the city of Lahore for a quarter of the day*

ii. Duni Chand was holding a grand annual feast to feed the Brahmins in celebration of Saraadh ceremony for the peace of his departed father's soul. Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji told him that his father had taken the body of a wolf and was starving on the nearby river bank at that time. Duni Chand immediately went there and saw the starving wolf. On seeing his son, the wolf died and thus spoke to him from his Astral or luminous body:

"In human body when I was nearing death, I smelt the flavor of meat being cooked in the neighboring house and felt an ardent desire for it. I died in the same state of mind. That is why I was given the body of a wolf so that I could fulfill my last desire in human life."

Gurbani also says:

**"Jit Laago Man Baasna,
Ant Saaee Pragtaani"** (pg. 267)

The desire to which the mind is attached, becomes manifest in the end.

This brings out clearly the thinking of Sahib Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji in this respect.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib prohibits eating of animal flesh in clearcut and unambiguous language in a number of places:

**"Jee Badhoh So Dharam Kar
Thaapoh, Adharam Kaho Kat Bhai.
Anpas Ko Munwar Kar Thaapoh,
Kaa Ko Kaho Kasaaee. (pg. 1103)**

You kill animals and call it religion (Rahit); then what indeed is irreligion (Kurahit)? Even then you consider yourself as a sage of sages; then whom to call a butcher?

**"Bed Kateb Kaho Mat Jhoothhay,
Jhoothhaa Jo Na Bichaarey.
Jo Sabh Meh Ek Khudai Kahat Ho, To Kio
Murghi Maarey" (pg. 1350)**

Do not call various religious texts false. False is one who gives no thought to their contents. If you consider God is in all, then why you slaughter the chicken (i.e., life?)

**"Rojaa Dharey, Manaavey Mlah,
Svaadat Jee Sanghaarey.
Aapaa Deldi Avar Nahin Dekhey,
Kaahey Kow Jhakh Maarey" (pg. 1375)**

You keep fasts (i.e., religious acts) to appease God. At the same time you slay life for your relish. This utter selfishness is nothing but empty or nonsensical talk.

**"Kabir Jee Jo Maareh Jor Kar,
Kaahtey Heh Ju Halaal.
Daftar Daee Jab Kaadh Hai,
Hoegaa Kaun Havaal" (pg. 1375)**

Whosoever slays life by force and call it sanctified;
What will be his fate when he will be called to account for
it in His Court?

**"Kabir Bhaang, Mach liii Surapaan
Jo Jo Praanee Khahey.**

Tirath, Barat, Nem Kiaye

Te Sabhay Rasaatal Jahey" (pg. 1376)

Whosoever eats flesh, fish, etc. and takes wine and
hemp, all his eligious acts will go to waste.

**"Kabir Khoob Khaana Khichri,
Ja Meh Amrit Lon**

Heraa Rotee Kaarney

Galaa Kataavey Kon" (pg. 1374)

Blessed is the simple food of rice mixed with salt;
Who would risk his head to be slain hereafter, for the meat
one eats here?

It is thus clear from the foregoing that the word
Kuthha used in the Sikh Code of Conduct does not refer
to Halaal or sacrificial meat at all, but refers to meat and
allied products as a whole. It means simply to slay or cut
the animal -whatever may be the method used for the
purpose. The use of the word in the same sense at a
number of places in Gurbani brings out this point beyond
any shadow of a doubt. Accordingly, eating flesh in
general (and not only Halaal) is totally prohibited for the
Sikhs and is one of the four Cardinal Sins enunciated in
the Sikh Code of Conduct. It is a great travesty of the
factual position to assert that, tIn the Sikh Doctrine,
therefore, there is no religious injunction for or against
meat eating; it is a matter of individual choice and
discretion, a most sensible principle.

All the Rahits (Do's) and Kurahits (Don'ts or taboos) are of fundamental importance in Sikhism. These are a pre-condition for one's being accepted for baptism or taking of Amrit which means nothing but Naam:

**"Amrit Naam Parmesar Tera
Jo Simray So Jeevey" (pg. 616)**

God; Amrit is nothing but your Naam and he alone lives who meditates or contemplates on it.

**Amrit Har Har Naam Hay Meri Jindareeay
Amrit Gurmat Paaey Ram" (pg. 538)**

The Naam Divine is Amrit; and is obtained through the Guru's Instruction.

This very fact shows that all these commandments have definite spiritual import and thus are of intrinsic value. None of these, therefore, can be left to an individual's discretion.

Besides propagating this misinterpretation of the word Kathha and encouraging the Sikhs in general to eat meat, the same people have gone to the extent of giving the very respectable name of Mahaan Prasad to this absolutely proscribed and profane food. This has been done to mislead the general unsuspecting, simple and innocent Sikh masses in a very subtle way. It is a pity that many of us have fallen prey to this mischievous game, and have even started propagating this misinterpretation.

In the old Sikh literature, the word Mahaan Prasad has been used to denote the most sacred and sanctified

food which is now commonly known as Karrah Prasad. Bhai Sahib Bhai Gurdas Ji has used this terminology a number of times in his works, and all the commentators of his works, including those of Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.), have accepted this interpretation. Karrah Prasad has a very sacred and distinct place in Sikh tradition and practice, and has, therefore, been very aptly and correctly referred to as Mahaan Prasad.